Ethiopia Says Death Toll from Raid Rises to 208; 108 Children Kidnapped

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The death toll from a raid carried out by South Sudanese gunmen in western Ethiopia has risen to 208 people and the assailants kidnapped 108 children, an Ethiopian official said on Sunday.

The attack took place on Friday in the Horn of Africa nation's Gambela region which, alongside a neighboring province, hosts more than 284,000 South Sudanese refugees who fled conflict in their country.

By Sunday afternoon, the number had risen to "208 dead and 75 people wounded" from 140 a day earlier, government spokesman Getachew Reda told Reuters, adding the assailants had also abducted 108 children and taken 2,000 head of livestock.

"Ethiopian Defense Forces are taking measures. They are closing in on the attackers," he said.

Getachew did not give further details, but officials in Gambela said on Saturday Ethiopian troops had crossed the border in pursuit of the attackers.

Cross-border cattle raids have occurred in the same area in the past, often involving Murle tribesmen from South Sudan's Jonglei and Upper Nile regions - areas awash with weapons that share borders with Ethiopia.

Previous attacks, however, were smaller in scale.

The gunmen are not believed to have links with South Sudanese government troops or rebel forces who fought the government in Juba in a civil war that ended with a peace deal signed last year.

South Sudanese officials were not immediately available for comment.

Under pressure from neighboring states, the United States, the United Nations and other powers, South Sudan's feuding sides signed an initial peace deal in August and agreed to share out ministerial positions in January.